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RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 4014  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 004818

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SUBJECT: MGPK01: SITREP 17, AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD: MUSHARRAF  
TO GIVE PRESS CONFERENCE; BHUTTO HEADS FOR LAHORE

REF: ISLAMABAD 4816

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: President Musharraf was scheduled to give a press conference at 1400 local time; we will provide immediate follow-up information on his remarks for the Department. Pakistan People's Party leader Benazir Bhutto moves to Lahore today in preparation for a planned "long march" November 13 from Lahore to Islamabad. Police are blocking PPP faithful from welcoming her at the Lahore Airport. In a reception for the diplomatic corps November 10, she reiterated demands that Musharraf announce a firm date for elections and his resignation from the Army. In response to an unfavorable editorial, the GOP decided to expel three Daily Telegraph reports; two have left the country and a third is expected to depart today. Sky and Fox news are back on the air, reportedly because they have not been critical of Musharraf; BBC, CNN and most local TV news cable channels remain blocked. Arrests of political opposition leaders continue although there are reports that hundreds of lawyers have been released on bail. Media reports the Pakistan-Iran pipeline deal has been finalized and will be signed within a month. Mission operations continue normally. End summary.

12. (U) The GOP amended November 10 the Army Act of 1952. Under the amended act, the Army will be able to try civilians on charges such as treason, sedition, attacking army personnel, "assaulting the president," and "giving statements conducive to public mischief." Under the Provisional Constitutional Order, the amendment is applicable immediately, without legislative approval. The GOP originally planned this amendment in response to former Chief Justice Chaudhry's decisions to release "disappeared" citizens, who have been held without charge. In the process, the Court had released several known or suspected terrorists. The amendment was considered a way to bring terrorists detained without charge to trial in military courts, which have less stringent evidentiary rules.

13. (U) In an open letter to People's Party (PPP) leader Benazir Bhutto, former prime minister Nawaz Sharif stated that his Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party would be willing to participate in an all party opposition conference. Bhutto has yet to respond publicly, but she reached out this week to the religious parties.

14. (U) Bhutto travels today to Lahore today in preparation for her announced "long march" from Lahore to Islamabad on November 13. The government is sure to block the march. Speaking to the diplomatic corps late November 10, Bhutto reiterated her demands on Musharraf to hold elections on time and to resign as Chief of Army Staff (COAS). Police are blocking PPP supporters from entering the Lahore Airport to welcome her.

15. (C) Musharraf convoked November 10 his corps commanders, the first such reported meeting since the imposition of emergency. Repeating his lines from the November 5 briefing to ambassadors and November 7 meeting with National Assembly members, Musharraf reportedly argued that his actions were justified because "the judiciary had given unnecessary relief to terrorists and anti-social elements." Musharraf committed to elections "as soon as possible."

16. (U) Local newspapers are reporting that 350 Lahore lawyers have been released on bail; however, police continue to arrest opposition party members. Also, it appears that the GOP has started to transfer lawyers, opposition party leaders and human rights activists from one jail to others, making it more difficult for Embassy (not to mention family members) to track these key contacts.

17. (U) The GOP reportedly has forcibly moved (former) Supreme Court Justice Javed Iqbal, who was the presiding justice hearing the case against Musharraf's re-election, from Islamabad to his home in Quetta. When Attorney General Malik Qayyum informed the Ambassador November 7 that justices would no longer be under house arrest, he added that the GOP expected them to leave the capital for their hometowns.

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18. (C) Sky and Fox news are being allowed to broadcast, reportedly because they have not been critical of Musharraf; BBC CNN and the largest of Pakistan's local TV news channels continue to be blocked. According to the ARY TV Chief, his station, along with Geo, Aaj and Dawn, will refuse to sign up to the government's new media code of conduct.

19. (C) In retaliation for an unfavorable editorial written in London, three journalists from the UK's Telegraph newspaper were ordered out of Pakistan. One journalist has already left; the other two, including the Telegraph's long-time bureau chief Islamabad Wilkinson, are scheduled to depart November 11. The editorial, said Musharraf "may be a son of a bitch, but he is our son of a bitch." The Information Ministry gave the official reason for the expulsion: "They were using foul and abusive language against Pakistan and Pakistan's leadership." Other western journalists with whom our spokesperson met fear this is the beginning of a larger crackdown by the GOP; they asked for continued public support from western governments.

110. (U) Sunday editorials in local newspapers highlight negative business climate created and inflation pressure caused by the imposition of emergency.

111. (U) The media reports that Pakistan and Iran have finalized the proposed \$7.4 billion pipeline deal; sources said the remaining technical details will be resolved within a month. (Post has reported extensively on our efforts to dissuade the GOP from completing this deal.)

PATTERSON